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Extension Service Circular 11

June, 19

COMMENTS ON EXTENSION WORK IN THE NORTH CENTRAL STATES

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COMMENTS ON EXTENSION WORK IN THE NORTH CENTRAL STATES*

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We have met to consider some of the problems of our county agents, our home demonstration agents, our home-management specialists, and our nutrition workers. In this work we shall consider something of what we have accomplished, build on the past, and go on to better ways. There are many matters needing our consideration. I desire to call to your attention only some of the more obvious of these.

First, may I mention the desirability of a larger recognition by the agricultural colleges themselves of their parentage and responsibility for county extension work and the teaching institution we are building up in the counties. For the most, county agents and extension specialists seem to them something tacked on to the institution - a part of it perhaps, and yet not of its very woof and fiber. Extension work has not been given full recognition as a child of the institution and heir of all its art and lore and culture and possessions, therefore entitled to its fullest guardianship and solicitude; and before extension work can come into its fullest development it must have this consideration from the college.

It is the Smith-Lever Act, primarily, that has made county extension work possible. The telling argument in Congress when the bill was under discussion, the argument that put the measure over, was the assertion that the people had made large appropriations to the experiment station and United States Department of Agriculture for research work in agriculture, that, as a result, knowledge of agriculture was 25 years in advance of practice, and that, to bring agricultural practices abreast of current knowledge, agents of the colleges and department to carry this new knowledge direct to the farmer and help the farmer apply such knowledge to the problems of his own fields, orchards, gardens, and home were necessary. The measure was essentially a college and United States Department of Agriculture measure. It was designed to extend the teachings of these institutions more fully to the people. In trying to develop the work we have in some cases overestimated the view that the work is primarily the farmer's responsibility. It is a cooperative responsibility. We seek and want the farmer's cooperation and have learned that he has a large contribution to make to the work; but responsibility for the work under the law rests with the colleges and the department.

To my mind, we should look upon the county agricultural agent, home demonstration agent, and club agent within the county, therefore, as constituting a little part of the State college of agriculture located in the county,

*Presented at the North Central States Extension Conference, Iowa State College, Ames, Iowa, April 26, 1926. Much of this material was also presented at the Southern States Extension Conference in Atlanta and at the conference of extension agents of the Eastern States in Washington, D. C.

a permanent, practical local teaching institution, an organic part of the college itself, teaching in its practical aspects what the college teaches, as permanent as the college itself, to continue as long as the college continues, a plan devised by the college for teaching practical agriculture and home economics to men and women, boys and girls who can not attend the college, essentially a subagricultural college outside the college walls whose teachers are members of the college faculty, entitled to sabbatic leave and all retirement privileges, the same as though located at the college. When the agricultural college regards the county extension force in this light, more effort will be exerted to put the county work on a permanent public basis and make of it a real institution.

Extension work should be looked upon as a part of the Nation's educational system, the same as our public schools and the Smith-Hughes classes, but reaching particularly the rural people out of school. The whole agricultural college should see in our county extension group a medium whereby each subject-matter department is afforded a means for increasing the scope and influence of its teaching. Each head of a department should develop plans for teaching, both through the college staff and through the county staff, the extension supervisory officers correlating the different lines of work into a unified program for the respective county agents. We will not have the right view of this matter until the heads of college departments consider it as much their duty to teach those outside the college wall as those inside and organize their teaching and extension staff accordingly.

Whatever we can say or do at this conference or in the future that will more fully bring home to the colleges their sense of parentage and responsibility for the county extension institution for teaching outside the college walls will add to the standing and efficiency of these county extension agents. It is not enough to educate through our schools and colleges. Extension work has come that the agricultural colleges may continue to educate throughout the whole span of the farmer's life and to know no limits other than the boundaries of the State.

In this connection, we should not forget that the agents in the counties are a little restless. They are not certain about the future of their work. I think, as administrators, we need to consider this matter. We can not get and hold the best men and women unless there is some permanency in their work. The agent must not worry about whether the county is going to continue the work, nor must the county agent's job be made contingent upon the county agent collecting funds for his or her own salary. It is the supervisor's job to see that funds for the county agent's salary are provided, not the county agent's job; and, in a larger way, it is the State's job, through right laws, to provide funds, rather than the supervisor's job.

Again, we must make the county agent's job a possible lifetime job and not wear him or her out in the first five or six years of work. Their day must be an 8 to 10-hour day, not a 14 to 18-hour day. Night meetings should be greatly reduced or abolished - most of them can be if we so determine. Give the county agent sabbatic leave. Provide for him a retirement fund and see that he is paid in accordance with his job, as an administrator of a 300,000-acre estate. Extension agents are educators. They are a small group

but they and the institutions they represent constitute the most potent force for rural development the world has ever seen. Let us make it possible for them to continue in the work and increase in usefulness from year to year, like the lawyer or college teacher or the doctor, clear to the end.

Overlapping of Smith-Hughes and extension work is still causing occasional alarm. I think, as an extension group, we should recognize that the Smith-Hughes teachers are for the most part the same kind of men and women graduates from the same institutions, as are our county agents. Their program of work, though a teaching program, is designed to meet the teaching needs in the county where the Smith-Hughes schools are located, just as ours is designed to meet the extension needs. We must clearly recognize that the Smith-Hughes teachers are our equals in training and in desire to make good with the farmers in the community. Theirs is an orderly procedure of training to fit men and women for the business of farming. Ours is more the business of rounding out and completing the farmer's knowledge with particular instruction following the result of research. We find the limiting factor of profits or satisfaction and supply that need. We worry sometimes because we think the Smith-Hughes teacher gets too far into the field of extension. If he is not successful in the extension field, we need not worry, if he is successful, will he not soon have so many students attending his organized classes and demanding his time and attention that he will automatically remove himself from the field of extension?

These two forces have been almost ideally devised to supplement each other's work. The Smith-Hughes forces, through their schools and classes, train men and women to become farm and home leaders, leaders of projects, ultimate leaders in many cases of 4-H clubs, and of like activities. Our extension work takes the boy and girl who may have left school, brings them into contact with the best things of agriculture, whets their appetites to do something, shows them the need of trained minds and hands if they are to succeed in the world, inspires them with the desire to finish their school work or go on to college, and is constantly recruiting Smith-Hughes schools and classes and colleges from the groups of the young men and women found in extension work who want to go on and do something worth while in the world and train themselves accordingly.

It is my belief that it is no more possible for Smith-Hughes teachers to get into extension work and stay there long than it is for extension forces to get into and remain long in Smith-Hughes teaching work. Each has too much work to do in his own field to remain long out of it. The public we serve will be cheered when they see these two great forces working together in sympathy and confidence, helping each other do the work each is charged with, doing and rejoicing in each other's success, for the work of each complements the other as do the two blades of a pair of shears.

I can not leave this subject, however, without pointing out the fact that Smith-Hughes forces are teaching us a significant thing. We wonder sometimes whether a county is willing to tax itself for another extension worker, and we doubt and hesitate. There are a good many rural counties in the United States with half a dozen Smith-Hughes teachers in them, each one getting about the same average salary of \$2,700 that is being paid the average county agent.

One rural county in Michigan has 12 Smith-Hughes teachers, another 10, and the State is contributing only \$1,000 toward the salary of each of these agents, the county paying all the rest.

Folks have about what they want, whether it is automobiles or teachers, and find a way of paying for both. If extension teaching is good enough, the counties will not stop with one extension agent or two but will demand and pay for enough to do the job.

This leads me to a comment on our home demonstration work. We have not given it adequate attention in the past. We are only beginning to do so now. We acknowledge the good home, the attractive home, the cultured home, and a high standard of living as the ultimate goal of extension work. If we are to attain this end we must plan for it just as systematically as we plan for good crops and good livestock.

Efficiency in home building, high ideals, education, and culture do not just naturally come everywhere. They can be fostered and stimulated. Giving a man the whole field of agriculture and home life to be responsible for and promote will prove no more effective in extension teaching than it has in college teaching. Efficiency comes with specialization. We need more home demonstration agents and more help in club work, and our home demonstration group here should not be satisfied with this conference unless it can evolve a working plan that shall look toward more work in home making, more homes reached. Theoretically women should lead in this work, but if, following the training of the centuries, they await our assistance, it should be granted before it is asked, and we should recognize it as a problem toward whose solution all of us should work.

There is this further thought in my mind, also, in this connection; It is pretty generally believed that the second agent in the county should be a home demonstration agent. I am willing to subscribe to this view, but possibly the putting in of such an agent would be made easier if it were made plain that she would do a large amount of club work. People are generally more concerned about their children's welfare than they are about their own.

A word about farming. The present agricultural situation throughout most of the country is such that there is no great inducement for a boy or girl to remain on the farm. They can probably earn higher wages in town, have shorter hours of labor, maybe get a white-collar job, and have a larger social and recreational life. The thing I want to impress is not to judge the future by the present. That is just what too many farmers do. They plant an extra field of potatoes if potatoes at planting time are high. They cut down their acreage of wheat if the price at planting time is low. As a result, they nearly always miss good prices at harvest time and are always losing. It's planting time now with a good many boys and girls. Shall they take an agricultural course? Things may look dark just now. But this is the very time to get ready for the good times ahead. Warren says this is a good time for the farmer's son to take an agricultural course. The probabilities are we have reached the bottom of the curve, and by the time a young man graduates agriculture and land values will be looking up and the college-trained boy will be prepared and ready to take advantage of both. What conditions will be at harvest time is the thing that should control our actions.

It is time to sound an optimistic note. Agriculture is on the up grade.

We have two groups of extension specialists with us. They meet with the directors and State leaders for the first time. What shall we say to them? We can hardly advise on subject matter. They know that better than we, but as supervisory officers our experience would urge the simple program, worked out and told over and over again in 50 different ways - told in letter, in story, in slogan and song, told in posters, in tours, in meetings, in the press, the circular, over the radio, by correspondence, and chiefest of all by demonstrations. As you perfect your ways of doing things, your ways of teaching and helping county agents and project leaders, so will you succeed most rapidly in extending your work.

One additional thought before closing. Rural population is decreasing. There are better wages and a more attractive life for many in town. About 60 per cent of our population is urban - it will probably not be long before 70 per cent or more of our population will be urban. This will probably be a good thing for the farmer. There will be less competition among those that remain; and, with the increased use of machinery, it is very probable they will be able to produce all the food and fiber needed by the Nation - at a price that will give a reasonable return for their labor and investment.

Our rural press is beginning to sense an element of danger in this situation. The urban population wants cheap food. In times of industrial distress the cry for cheap food from this source is likely to be so loud as to reach the ears of Congress and especially the ears of urban Congressmen, who are in the majority in Congress. Unless wise statesmanship prevails, the tariff at such times on farm products will be removed; and the cheap food produced by the men and women we turn away from our doors under our immigration laws will be permitted to come in in competition with that produced by our own farmers, resulting in great distress to our farmers and their ultimate reduction to the peasant and serf classes of other countries.

Hope lies in the development and maintenance of a self-sustaining nation, of bringing agriculture and industry along hand in hand with each other, in convincing urban people and statesmen of the vital necessity of an intelligent, contented, prosperous rural people if the nation as a whole is to attain its highest development. As extension forces we can do much to develop the right relationship and right understanding between rural and urban people, and that effort should be begun now, before majority views get set in an opposite direction.

We can do much, too, through our efforts to bring into country life high standards of living, culture, and social satisfaction, and in larger degree making country life as attractive, or even more attractive than city life. It is my belief that if we are allowed to go on and develop country life as it has been developing during the past 15 years it will ultimately become the ideal, the envied life in America. We can hardly be content with a goal less than this. With intelligence comes culture, efficiency, and increased ability for united effort in a common cause; and a united people, even though in the minority, can accomplish much in holding the nation on an even course.

It may not be amiss in closing to say a word as to our objectives.

(1) We teach workmanship in the operations of the farm and the home. It is easier to plow straight than crooked, to plant treated than untreated seed, because the mind is interested.

(2) We teach production, economy, and thrift because satisfaction flows from full granaries and cellars, and these provide against want.

(3) We teach cooperation, association of effort, because through this comes the exhilaration of strength, power, and greater accomplishment.

(4) We teach the altruistic life because when a man does something for others without hope of personal reward he starts himself on a great spiritual adventure.

(5) We teach play and pageantry because out of these efforts at self-expression come individual, family, and community joy and satisfaction.

(6) We teach the native values of fields and woods, lakes and streams, the earth and soil, all things that surround us where we are, in order that each day all may live more fully, more understandingly, more in harmony with his surroundings.

(7) We demonstrate the method; we promote the increase; we enlarge the income; we develop the community; we do all things contemplated by the law; but the thing most in our minds, the ultimate purpose of all our work is the building of men and women themselves. This thought is admirably brought out by Elbert Hubbard, who says:

"We are all fools until we know
That in the common plan
Nothing is worth the making
If it does not make the man.
Why build these temples glorious
If man unbuilded goes?
We build the world in vain
Unless the builder grows."

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